DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 388 186 HE 028 729

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TITLE Orientation of New University Professors: A Framework for an Orientation Manual.
PUB DATE [Oct 95]
NOTE 21p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Beginning Teacher Induction; *College Faculty; Faculty College Relationship; *Faculty Handbooks; Higher Education; Special Education; *Teacher Orientation
IDENTIFIERS Orienting Information

ABSTRACT

The successful orientation of new university professors has benefits for both the new professor and the university. For the faculty member, benefits of rapid orientation to the new position involve greater control of the factors that cause stress to professors, more rapid pursuit of the contributions that lead to future promotion and tenure, and increased ability in navigating the unique culture and systems within the university setting. Successful orientation of faculty provides universities both financial and time benefits, not to mention increased productivity of the faculty member. The appendix contains a framework for developing an orientation handbook specifically for professors of special education. Contains eight references. (JB)

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Running head: PROFESSOR ORIENTATION

ED 388 186

Orientation of New University Professors: A Framework for an Orientation Manual

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Abstract

The successful orientation of new university professors has benefits for both the professor and the university. For the faculty member, benefits of rapid orientation to the new position involve greater control of the factors that cause stress to professors, more rapid pursuit of the contributions that lead to future promotion and tenure, and increased ability in navigating the unique culture and systems within the university setting. Successful orientation of faculty provides universities both financial and time benefits, not to mention increased productivity of the faculty member. This article concludes with a framework for developing an orientation handbook specifically for professors of special education.

Orientation of New University Professors:

A Framework for an Orientation Manual

The efficient and successful orientation of new higher education faculty has benefits for both the university and the individual professor. Because of this, time and guidance should be devoted to the orientation process. The Oxford American Dictionary defines "orientation" as "to face or be directed in a specific direction", "to become accustomed to a new situation" and "to get one's bearings" (Ehrlich, Flexner, C., & Hawkins, 1980, p. 470). Higher education is certainly a setting in which each of these descriptions has relevance.

Benefits to Universities

Colleges and universities have a vested interest in orienting new faculty successfully. Among the many reasons for this are the supply and demand problems of professors in certain fields of education as well as the high costs involved in recruiting and hiring new faculty.

In the field of special education researchers noted 7.5% of the searches in special education resulted in failure to fill the positions (Sindelar, Buck, Carpenter & Watanabe, 1993). In more than half of these failed searches at smaller institutions, it was "because no acceptable candidates applied" (Sindelar, et al., 1993, p. 245).

Another issue that has a bearing on this is the coming future retirement of many professors in special education in the United States (Pierce, Smith & Clark, 1992). With decreasing doctoral graduates in the field of special education (Sindelar & Taylor, 1988) and the potential for even greater demand as indicated by expected future retirements, the successful orientation of hired faculty is even more crucial now than ever.

In this era of financial cutbacks, efficient use of university funds is critical as hiring new faculty is expensive. The cost of advertizing in journals and "The Chronicle of Higher Education", a frequently used source to recruit new faculty, is high. An ad might run over $1000 (J. Gray, personal communication, May 12, 1995). In addition, transporting and housing two to four candidates for open positions can run as high as two to three thousand dollars, depending on how many candidates are interviewed and their current location. When you add to this phone calls to candidates and their references and moving allowances given new faculty with employment, filling a vacant position could easily cost the institution three to six thousand dollars.

Beyond the actual observable financial outlay, there is extensive professional time which is delegated to this search process. Usually a committee is involved in creating ads, screening files, making phone calls,

doing reference checks, as well as providing window time transporting candidates to and from interview activities, hotels, and airports. This is beyond the time actually spent meeting with the candidate and observing his/her class or faculty presentations. You can multiply this time by the three to five people who might serve on a committee.

As universities continue to find it more difficult to secure qualified faculty for open positions, successful orientation becomes an important issue. Considering the financial and time outlay of a university and its faculty, it seems only prudent to assist the new faculty member in making a positive start at the institution.

Benefits to New Faculty Members

Certainly, new professors have many reasons to desire some assistance as they become oriented to the demands, procedures, benefits, and personnel at their new university. Some of the key reasons include maintaining a position deemed suitable to them, reducing stress, and increasing productivity.

The first reason why successful orientation is important is the difficulty in finding a "suitable" position and beginning the climb toward promotion and tenure. As Lanks (1990) pointed out, the institution one chooses will affect both the kind of contribution one makes as well as the

attitude the professor will exhibit in making this contribution. Asking the right questions during the interview and in that first year will help new faculty get started on a positive and respected road to promotion at the university.

Jobs may not be secured merely because of academic qualifications so when a professor finds one deemed a good fit it is important to be successful there. Mertz and McNeeley (1990) found that women getting professor positions in educational administration perceived they did so more because of their male advisors' "brokering" for them and being already known to individuals at the institution than because of other more standard qualifications. Not everyone has someone to "broker" for them so retaining good positions, once secured, should be critical to new professors.

The second reason is that there is inherent stress in a university faculty position. The situation in which new higher education professors find themselves is one in which productivity is measured most frequently in the three domains of teaching, research, and service. Getting "one's bearings" in all three areas and charting a course to success is no simple task. Gmelch (1993) points out the problem of unclear expectations in these three areas as a potential source of stress. In addition, stress

resulting from a lack of adequate time to pursue these endeavors further increases the need to quickly ask the right questions. Hopefully, the answers will help new professors get pointed in the right direction in interacting with students, class preparation, developing a record of scholarship, and making connections necessary to become involved in service activities.

A Framework for Faculty Orientation

Although some institutions are beginning to establish staff development centers which assist in orientation of new faculty (Oromaner, 1994), current research literature contains few examples of this in practice. It is because of this that a framework was developed to organize questions new professors should ask or universities should answer to facilitate the orientation process (see appendix). Since it was felt that the ultimate responsibility for learning the university system rests with the faculty member, the framework provided is prepared with questions for the faculty member to ask of others. This could be changed to include the answers. Although a faculty handbook may address some of these same issues, many of these things remain mysteries for new faculty members until they ask for the information. The framework addresses the three standard issues of teaching, research, and service. It also addresses

the special issues which arise for part-time faculty, faculty joining a university mid-year and faculty trained in other countries where the rules and regulations may vary. Filled with the answers to these questions, new faculty members should find their transition to their new position a more smooth road toward success.

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APPENDIX

A Framework for an Orientation Manual for New Education Professors

Teaching, Advising, and Field Experience Supervision

1. Is there an NCATE theme that is to be woven into all coursework? What is it? Are there any particularly useful articles, texts, publication, that explain the theme that should be incorporated into the syllabus?
2. Are there any other commonalities that are to be woven into the coursework or must be addressed in the syllabi?
   a. Grading practices
   b. Model for syllabi
   c. Location of syllabi
   d. Course expectations for certain types of courses
3. How are texts selected for courses?
   a. Is it an individual decision?
   b. Is there a group review process? What is it?
   c. Where, how, and when are texts ordered?
4. What is the advisement system at this University?
   a. Is there an advisement manual for faculty?
   b. What type of documentation trail is necessary for advisement?
   c. Is the student or the faculty member ultimately responsible for advisement?

d. What are the timelines followed for advisement at this university?

e. Who do I ask if I have questions about advisement?

f. What are the procedures that are followed here for acceptance of students into the undergraduate or graduate programs?

g. What are the procedures for comprehensive or exit exams?

h. Who serves on advisement committees? What are their responsibilities?

5. What information is available about field experiences in special education at this university?

a. What is the chain of command for setting up placements and entering schools?

b. What are the requirements of the field experiences?

c. What expectations do the schools have for this field experience?

d. What information do the schools need in order for theprogram to work effectively?

e. Are there university guidelines for the frequency and purpose of visits to the field experience sites?

f. What documentation system is used for field experiences?

g. What locations/centers/schools/programs are commonly used for field experiences? Who are the contact persons at each location?

6. Are there opportunities for off campus instruction for extra pay?
   a. How do I set up an off campus course?
   b. How much as I paid for off campus instruction?
   c. Does this impact on my courseload or affect NCATE standards?
   d. What opportunities are available for off campus instruction?

Research

1. What are the procedures for achieving human subject approval at this university?
2. What are the local grant funding sources at this university?
3. What are the research interests of other faculty members in this division?

   Name Research Interest

4. Which journals in our field are found at the library on campus?
5. How can I access information (journal articles, data, etc.) that is not found on this campus?
6. What electronic information is available on the campus?

7. What other library research assistance is available for research on this campus?
8. Are there any guidelines for minimum research and publishing requirements to be promoted or tenure at this university?
9. How are faculty informed about grant opportunities and is there assistance for grant writing on campus?

Service

1. Where or how is service defined at this university?
2. How is "service" viewed in relation to tenure and promotion? How is it evaluated?
3. What service opportunities exist in this community or state relative to my field of education? What have faculty done in the past?
4. What professional organizations have local chapters here at this university? How can I get involved in these?
5. Which professional organizations have chapters in this state and who are the contact people for these organizations?

   Names of Organizations Contact Persons

General Things You'll Want to Know

1. How do I get in the buildings, classrooms, and offices? Where and how do I get keys?

2. What types of secretarial services are available on campus?
   a. Turn around time for typing
   b. Turn around time for copying
   c. Photocopying regulations/limits/procedures
   d. Work study assistance for secretarial activities
   e. Computer test scoring procedures
3. What types of AV equipment are available and how do I access them?
4. How do I go about using university vehicles?
   a. Travel authorization forms
   b. Where and how to get keys
   c. Travel policies
   d. Reimbursement procedures
5. Are there university or departmental policies on office hours or length of day?
6. How do students communicate with me and how are messages received?
7. How are professors evaluated at this university?
   a. Where and how are courses evaluated?
   b. What do the evaluation forms look like?
   c. What other types of evaluation are completed on professors?

8. What are the policies relative to contract renewal?

Special Issues for Faculty Entering the University Mid-Year

1. How can I quickly become oriented to the community regarding the following issues?
    a. Housing
    b. Personal Maintenance
    c. Public/private schools for family members
    d. Churches
    e. University life
2. What is the best access to teaching information to facilitate quick course development?
    a. Construction of syllabus
    b. University and grading requirements
    c. New course development procedures
    d. Course sequences and prerequisite skills of students
    e. Collaboration with other faculty
3. What is the most important information to know about advising?
    a. Admission and graduation requirements
    b. Programs of study and course sequence
    c. Timelines for students

d. Comprehensive examinations

4. What are the professional expectations?

   a. Time management

   b. Professional development

   c. Research

   d. Service

5. Is there someone who could serve as a mentor to me?

Special Issues for Part Time Faculty

1. What are the primary responsibilities of the position?
2. What committee assignments, community service or meetings are required for effective performance of this position?
3. What teaching responsibilities are part of this position?

   a. Are there written competencies for the courses?

   b. Is there a syllabus to follow or is there someone else on campus who has taught this before?

   c. What competencies do students have before entering the course?

   d. What facilities are available to assist me?

   e. What assistance is available on campus?

4. How is communication with students facilitated when I am not on campus?
   a. Is there a place for messages?
   b. Are office hours and phone numbers available to students?
   c. Where can students turn in work when the instructor is not here?
5. How is communication from the Division of School of Education facilitated when I am not on campus?
   a. How is necessary information from meetings conveyed to the part time people?
   b. How are notices provided for voluntary meetings for me?
6. How are field experience supervision procedures shared with part time personnel?
   a. Is there someone with previous experience with the program who can offer assistance?
   b. What procedures are used to assign, place, supervise, and evaluate students in field experiences?

Special Issues for Foreign Faculty

1. What legislation and regulations occupy a prominent place in training pre-service teachers in this state or country which must be understand and imparted by faculty here?
2. What are the state and regional certification requirements and standards that result in the desired teacher certification? Which courses fulfill those standards and which competencies must be addressed in these courses to facilitate successful certification?
3. What are the typical assignment standards and grading expectations of these types of college courses in this country?